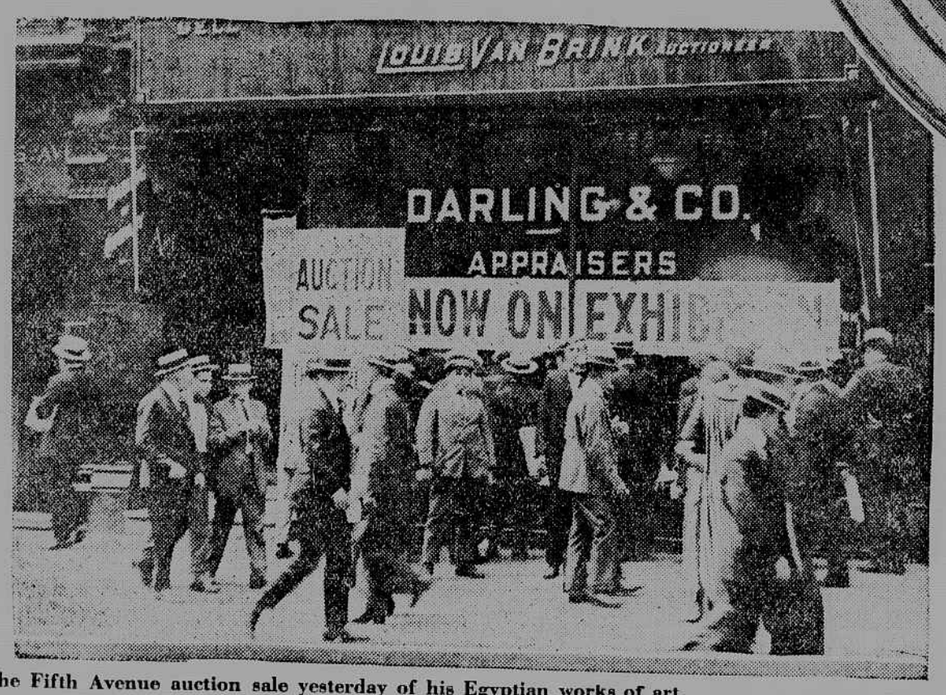
From Egyptian Palace to East Side Restaurant

Cast Aside by the Princess de Chimay, Rigo, Violinist, Yesterday Sold Art Treasures She Gave Him

The Princess de Chimay

A painting of Rigo, her discarded husband



The Fifth Avenue auction sale yesterday of his Egyptian works of art

WHEN the auctioneer's hammer fell on the last of the sumptuous collection of furnishings that Janczsi Rigo had ordered crowded into the warerooms of Darling & Co. for auction on the last of the week that hammer also marked an emphatic period to a romance that has outromanced the romanticists. Monte Cristo was all right in his way, though he never married a princess. But Rigo, possessing little else than a fiddle, a radiant smile that has broken more hearts than a man of his fifty-six years can readily remember, and a gift for wild Hungarian music, charmed the Princess de Chimay, of Belgium, née Clara Ward, of Chicago, away from her titled consort, causing her to forsake for Rigo alone the friendship of kings and emperors. Marc Antony wooed and won Cleopatra on the banks of the Nile 2,000 years ago, but Antony started with the enviable position of runner-up on the greatest Roman of them all. Rigo merely started with a background of vague matrimonial troubles resulting in separation from his gypsy wife in the hills of Hungary. Nor does history recall that Cleopatra bought for Antony a fifty-two-room house of marble on the banks of the Nile. Yet that's just exactly what the Princess de Chimay did for her Rigo, with so many gifts thrown in that Darling & Co. have estimated their value at more than $500,000.

All Rigo had was a smile and a fiddle.

And Rigo has the smile and fiddle still, and still he smiles and fiddles, not in the bright cafés of Paris now, but down in the cellar of Little Hungary, on the East Side of New York. Which proves, perhaps, that Hungary is for the Hungarians and that they gravitate back there, even after the highest flights among the stars.

Violin Her Gift

Else why should Rigo still continue to charm the world with the $5,000 violin—a gift from the princess—when his furniture has netted him a fortune? Besides, he himself admits that the Princess de Chimay at her death in 1916 left him $500,000, over in Paris, and then also there is a little matter of $500 a month, untouched, over in France that the princess allowed him after their separation. Even though Rigo is reputed to have a record of eight marriages to his credit, it would seem that alimony and personal expenses might readily be covered by such a fortune without a salary eked out in Little Hungary.

Is it for the love of his art alone that he is playing Rubinstein and the rest among the clatter of Little Hungary's dishes and the gurgle of Little Hungary's table d'hôte wine? Whatever the reason, every evening sees Rigo, the accomplished man of the world, smiling and debonair, unhaunted by his past glories, imbued with the flair of great experience, playing to the patrons of the East Side restaurant. He has aged since his great days, but the cut of his suit is of the finest. His cravat is the envy of many a diner; a gold wrist watch adorns his right arm, and an opal ring sparkles merrily on his finger. Despite his fifty-six years his gestures have lost none of their nervous grace or quickness. If the world has forgotten his art, Rigo has not, and in Little Hungary Rigo is still the chief artist.

"I would rather have ten rooms on Broadway," says Rigo, "than a thousand on the Nile."

They are crating up a large part of the contents of the Nile house now and sending it to its latest purchasers. There is a massive Renaissance cabinet of ebony, ornately decorated with gilt work and bronze medallions, so heavy and massive that it is valued at $11,000. There is a collection of Chinese rugs as large and varied as Darling & Co. have ever seen. Cabinets filled with amber, Chinese ivories, porcelain vases, furniture of the days of Louis Seize and Quize, curtains of Valenciennes lace, velvet hangings, rare and exotic china, as varied a collection of ultra embellishments as have ever stood in a Fifth Avenue window, have all gone under the hammer. The Princess de Chimay is dead and the furniture of the marble palace on the Nile is scattered about New York, and Rigo is still fiddling.

His Music Won Paris

Rigo has always fiddled. He was born in Hungary fifty-six years ago, married the daughter of his employer, and began to ply his musical vocation in Paris, where his wild gypsy music met with the plaudits of the multitude, and Rigo liked applause. Rigo still likes it, even among the clatter of the plates in the table d'hôte. Then in the late '90s Rigo leaped into fame. The modern Antony met the Cleopatra from Chicago.

The modern Cleopatra had set the gossips of Europe buzzing even before that time. She was Clara Ward, daughter of Eber B. Ward, the King of the Lakes and the richest man in Michigan. He himself was an eccentric character, but his daughter in her bizarre and impetuous life surpassed him a hundred times. At the age of seventeen she was being educated in a European convent, and suddenly decided she would stay there no longer. The heiress to some $4,000,000, her hand was sought by a score of noblemen. On the urging of her mother she finally married Prince Joseph de Chimay and Caraman at a ceremony which caused a greater stir than the wedding of the Duchess of Marlborough.

"What is commonly called public opinion does not exist for me," the Princess de Chimay once said.

And she was quick to show it in a career which bordered closely on international scandal. A score of flirtations were attached to her name, justly or unjustly. The infatuation of old King Leopold of Belgium was a matter of public comment.

Rigo, the violinist, was playing one night in a Paris café where the princess and her husband were dining. He was playing with the same dulcet notes and the same epitomized and blissful smile that cause a thrill to-day in Little Hungary, and the notes of his music carried the heart of the wayward princess with it.

"The King of Belgium was paying ardent court to her that night," Rigo has said. "I stood behind her chair and played, ah, as I have never played before. And then I kissed her hand."

It was not so very long after that the two, dressed as gypsies, eloped and were married, after the Prince de Chimay obtained a divorce and heavy damages. The extravagances of the princess had depleted her fortune, but it was still large. Rigo, who had stolen her from kings, accompanied her through the capitals of Europe, while she showered him with gifts that might have turned the head of any man.

A Palace and a Circus

"She built me a palace on the Nile, in Egypt," Rigo is quoted as saying, "It was in Cairo. And I had a menagerie, which my princess bought from Barnum & Bailey's circus just to amuse me.

"Every day for eleven years she gave me a present. Cases of jewels, diamond revolvers and gem cases of diamonds and rubies. Once on my birthday she bought me a yacht. On another birthday she gave me the entire wine cellar of a prince. Then came the day when she gave me sixteen black Arabian horses for my stables, which she built with the marble house on the 4,000 acres of land reserved for her by the Khedive of Egypt."

Judging from the foregoing account the exotic luxuriance of the furnishings sold at auction seems almost mild, and it is small wonder that the couple were troubled with debts.

Although Rigo states with complacency that he and his princess lived together for eleven years, which was longer than any of her later attempts at domestic bliss, the end of the Egyptian idyll was calculated to shatter his pride. On a trip to Vesuvius the princess was captivated by an Italian porter and Rigo found himself deserted. But Rigo seems to have taken his trouble complacently, for he still had his smile and his fiddle, and still continued to break hearts just as rapidly as his former consort.

His Love Dead

From 1906 onward stories of Rigo and the princess have flashed up from time to time. Now it was stated that the princess was suing him for large sums of money, and again it was rumored that the princess had sent him the wherewithal to pay his passage to her. But Rigo never joined her again, though they met afterward as friends. The artist stated that his love for the princess was dead, and his subsequent appearance as co-respondent in a divorce suit afforded confirmation.

Rigo came to New York in search of fame. He came to thrill America as he had thrilled Europe. He organized a Hungarian orchestra, only to have his violin attached for breach of contract. Yet he spurned the $500 a week that he claims the princess allowed him during her lifetime and continued to fiddle, and somewhere in Paris the furnishings of his house on the Nile rested in crates.

Deeply moved, he heard the news of the princess's death in Little Hungary three years ago, and yesterday the auctioneer's hammer marked the end of the story. The furniture of the house on the Nile has passed by the auctioneer, and Rigo still is fiddling.

A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE—By Pierre Mille

Translated by William L. McPherson

Here is another of Pierre Mille's satiric ventures into the field of modernized politics and economics. It is an amusing forecast of the near future as that future is outlined for us by the Bolshevists and syndicalists. It may be regarded as genial irony by some. But as things are going there may be less irony in it than there is truth.

"THIS," said the great thaumaturgist of La Salpêtrière, "is the same chair, exactly, as the one you see in the first act of 'La Dame de chez Maxim.' Science, I blush to acknowledge it, owes its progress sometimes to the romancers and even to the vaudevillists. Hypnosis is produced by this admirable apparatus automatically and instantaneously. But that is not all. Here an improvement is introduced of which I think I have a right to be proud. Once you are in a state of sleep I can make you see the future—your own future, that is. For as regards the general course of affairs in the universe the vision one gets is still rather confused. But Paris was not built in a day. And I think I shall be able to develop my invention further."

With the egoism of a man of the world I declared in all sincerity that the certainty of knowing my own destiny sufficed to satisfy me completely. Whereupon I stretched myself out on the machine.

"And now," the great thaumaturgist asked me, after a few seconds, "in what year are you?"

"Wait," I answered, "until I consult the calendar. Oh, yes. We are in the year 1920. I believe we are still under the republic. But, curiously enough, I am somewhat uncertain about it."

"Don't bother about that. I warned you that general conditions are not so easy to distinguish. How about your own affairs?"

"I still follow the same profession. I am a cheap and random pamphleteer. The price of butter has increased 600 per cent and a pair of Molière slippers costs 300 francs. The daily wage of the workingman is 35 francs. But my remuneration, it seems to me, is less than it was before. Existence is not very gay for members of the so-called liberal professions. However, I am a man of courage. I work harder. I multiply my efforts. It doesn't matter that my wardrobe is replenished less frequently than it was before the war, because nobody notices the difference. I have no time to go about."

"I congratulate you on your energetic disposition. But what else?"

"What else? Yes. They have just passed an eight-hour law. That is a little disturbing for me, you understand. With ten hours of steady work, unfortunate quill-driver as I am, I cannot supply the miserable needs of my existence. What is going to become of me if I must now consecrate two of my ten hours to enforced idleness? I rush to the mayor's office in my quarter to ask for information. But they can give me none and tell me to go to the police prefecture. They send me to the Minister of Labor. There is just as much red tape as there was before."

"It was inevitable that there should be as much as there was before. Go on."

"At the Ministry of Labor I finally discover the proper functionary. I submit my case to him. He bursts out laughing. It appears that in my character as a man of letters, working at home and having no employes, the law doesn't affect me. The situation is this: My servants may not work more than eight hours a day. But I, their master, am absolutely free to indulge my temperament as far as I wish. I prefer it that way. Otherwise how could I make a living?

"So I continue to devote myself to the most arduous labor. I become a type like Balzac—minus his talent and, I fear, minus his facility. Meanwhile the price of butter has risen 900 per cent and Molière slippers cost 500 francs a pair. I begin to envy those glorious mutilated heroes who have only one foot. That jealousy being not only morbid, but fruitless, I decide to wear only sabots while I am at home. After all, they are warmer and one can procure reasonably substantial ones, made out of beechwood, for 60 francs. And when they are worn out you can burn them, which is a consideration worth taking into account, in view of the high price of coal and firewood. But the pressure of the sabots gives me cruel headaches. I remember that before the war persons enjoying a moderate fortune could combat this affection by taking tablets filled with a substance called antipyrine, or analgésine or pyramidon. I go to a druggist. He tells me that he has this precious remedy, but that it is worth its weight in paper money. Ten five-franc bills are the equivalent of one capsule. My resources do not permit me such a luxury. I content myself with putting my head under a spigot, as my virtuous ancestors used to do.

"A great misfortune happens. This spigot, my sole resource against headaches, and also indispensable for domestic uses, gets out of order. It is necessary to repair it. I see myself ruined. A plumber appears, after keeping us waiting many days. He wears an elegant coat, with a rare flower in the buttonhole. His trousers are smartly creased. I say to him, very respectfully, 'Bourgeois, here is the spigot.'

"After surveying me disdainfully, he answers: 'Old fellow, we'll fix that.' My wife, who has more courage than I have, follows him out and asks him if by chance he has some old clothes which he is about to discard. He is very gracious, and thanks to him, I am able to renew my wardrobe a little.

"I have always been an optimist. I wish to continue to be one. I persuade myself that these difficulties are temporary and that the prices of necessaries of life will diminish. For I have no hope of any increase in my income."

Here the great thaumaturgist of La Salpêtrière gave some turns to his ingenious apparatus.

"In what year are you now?"

"Let me look at the calendar again. In 1925. They have just passed a new labor law, under the pressure of the labor unions, which thought the burdens imposed on their members inequitable and intolerable. The working day is to be reduced, henceforth, to six hours. It has been asserted that production will not be diminished. On the contrary, all the theorists have promised that it will be increased. In reality, it has been greatly reduced and prices have risen again. A pair of Molière slippers costs now 1,200 francs, and a pair of sabots 180 francs. The peasants, who make the butter and have continued the ancestral tradition of wearing sabots, have raised the price of butter to correspond with the increase in the price of sabots. At least, that is how the newspapers explain it, adding that such an economic phenomenon is absolutely normal. I don't care whether it is normal or not. All I know is that never again will butter, or even margarine, appear on my table.

"But the Paris street sweepers have just decided to hold a reunion every week at the Restaurant Lavoie, to talk over their little affairs at breakfast. The price of the breakfast is 1,200 francs a plate.

"Meanwhile I am starving to death. I have lost eighteen kilos. I must escape from this miserable situation some way or another.

. . . . .

"I have escaped. Why didn't I think of a way out sooner? Now I am putting on flesh again. I can visit my tailor and—which seems to me a fabulous luxury—I even took a taxi the other day to go to work.

"For now I have work. I am a worker, a proletarian. I am a union street sweeper. Consequently, I also breakfast at Lavoie's. I find myself, moreover, in a more advantageous position than most of the other union street sweepers, because I remain a man of letters. That vocation doesn't bring me in much. Yet it furnishes enough to pay for my cigars and a few other superfluities.

"I reasoned the matter out thus: As a man of letters I work eighteen hours a day and cannot make a living. But six hours of street sweeping bring me two louis a day, and nothing prevents me, after I have finished sweeping, from taking up my pen and using it as long as I want to, since, as a literary man, working at home, I am not constrained by the six hour day.

"That is what I have done. And I notice that I have many imitators. I am amazed to see of what material our corps of street cleaners is composed. In my quarter there are in it two members of the French Academy, five sculptors, eight painters and I can't tell you how many poets and novelists. We do not strain ourselves. Every two or three months we go on strike for a raise in pay. While the strike lasts we receive an allowance from the federation of unions, and we work at home at our avocations. It is fine. I am now altogether reconciled to the new aspect which civilization has assumed."